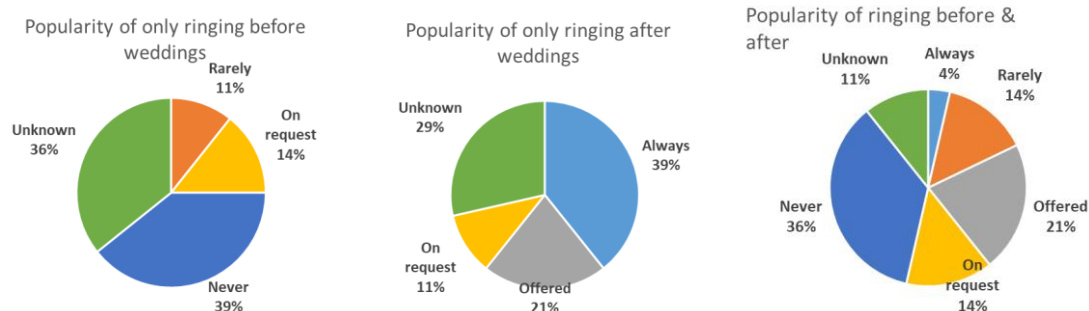


Tonbridge District Wedding Ringing Survey- Summer 2022

(Revised 24 Nov 2022 to include two late responses)

During August and September 2022, I conducted a survey of Wedding Ringing across the churches with ringing bells in the KCACR Tonbridge District (I have deliberately excluded East Peckham because it has been deconsecrated). Surveys were completed for 25 of the 28 towers in the district (89% response rate) – my thanks go to everyone who did so.

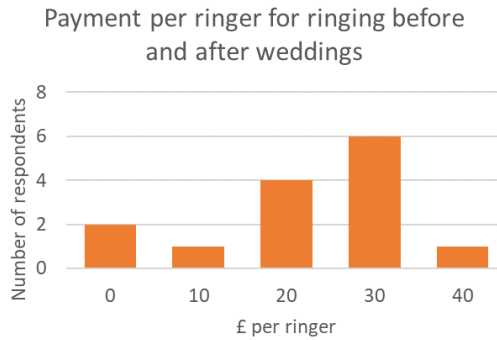
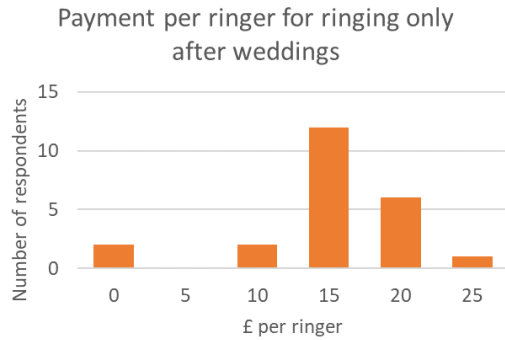
The most popular arrangement is to just ring after weddings – 11 towers (44% of respondents) only ring afterwards and another 9 offer afterwards only ringing or do so on request. Just one tower always aims to ring before and after weddings. A total of 11 towers *never* ring before weddings and a further 10 *never* ring before and afterwards. Chart 1 to 3 below shows the distribution of towers that only ring before, only after or before and after weddings.



Respondents at 4 towers do not know what the church charges wedding parties for the bells. The most charged by a church for wedding bells is £160 (before only), £220 (after only) or £320 (before and after). The fees most frequently requested by churches for wedding bells are £120 (before only), £160 (after only) or £270 (before and after).

Two towers in the district do not pay local ringers to ring for weddings, although there are exceptions for students or visiting ringers. Instead at these towers all the wedding fees are paid into the Tower Fund which is used to pay KCACR subscriptions and for ropes, etc.

The maximum paid to each ringer for wedding ringing is £20 (before only), £25 (after only) or £50 (before and after). The most common amounts (mode) paid to ringers are £15 (before only), £15 (after only) or £40 (before and after). However, the payments at several towers are expected to increase in 2023 (the increment being £5 per ringer per session). 16 respondents stated that visiting ringers are paid the same as local ringers, but one indicated that visitors may be paid more in future to cover parking charges. Charts 4 and 5 below show the frequency of different payments per ringer for ringing after only or ringing before and after (2022 rates).



Where there is a difference between fees charged and payments to ringers 6 towers (24%) make a payment to the KCACR Bell Restoration Fund (BRF aka Spliced Fund), 18 towers pay a contribution into Tower funds administered by the ringers. At 5 churches (20%) any difference between fees received by the church and payments made to ringers are retained by the church. Two towers charge differently for 6 or 8 bells and one reimburses the wedding party if fewer than 6 bells are rung. However, at least 3 towers charge the same, irrespective of the number of bells rung. An increasing number of churches prefer not to pay ringers in cash, instead paying directly into a nominated bank account in advance, or in two cases in arrears.

Most towers (19 of 24 responding – 76%) ring for between 15 and 20 minutes after weddings and another 2 ring for up to 30 minutes. Ringing before weddings is usually limited to 15 to 20 minutes, rarely up to 30 minutes, but may get extended if the bride is late.

Although most respondents expressed frustration at the number of excessively late brides (e.g. over 30 or 45 minutes late), and many vicars have been made aware of the challenges this presents to ringers choirs and other volunteers, few towers have formal arrangements in that eventuality. Some respondents quoted examples where ringing after weddings was shortened, or even limited to ringing beforehand, for weddings starting excessively late. After experiencing a bride who was over 45 minutes late at another tower, we asked our vicar to explain to wedding parties that ringers (and choirs, and even vicars) often have other commitments and cannot wait indefinitely. As a result, none of the last three weddings of the year started more than 5 minutes after the published time.

At 8 towers bells are rung from the ground floor or from a gallery visible from the church. At only 3 of these there is any form of dress code - 2 prefer ringers to wear KCACR shirts, 2 state no scruffy trousers or shorts and 1 requires 'smart casual'. Respondents from 11 towers (44%) indicated that they would not charge to ring for weddings of local ringers or their immediate families. Furthermore, 5 also mentioned that fees may also be waived for close relatives of others closely associated with the church (e.g. choir, churchwardens).

David James (Leigh)